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18 June 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Southeast Asia Briefing of the CIA Subcommittee of
House Armed Services, 18 June 1964, 9 a.m.

1. On 18 June 1964 the Director met with the CIA Subcommittee of House Armed Services for a briefing on the world situation and certain other specific items. The Subcommittee was most interested in the Southeast Asia situation, and the Director's substantive briefing was based on the attached papers (attachments 1 and 2, Vietnam and Laos).

2. After certain specific questions by Subcommittee members, which are covered in a separate detailed memorandum for the record, the Chairman, Mr. Vinson, asked what the plans were for the future, and the Director said we would like to return in Laos to the 1962 Agreement if its enforcement could be assured. He pointed out there were two parallel moves, one a massive diplomatic effort, possibly ending at a Geneva conference, backed up by a series of military moves, and that in this it was necessary to tie the Laotian and South Vietnam problems together. Mr. Arends said in his opinion the crucial question was whether we had made the decision that we are in Southeast Asia to stay. The Director stated that from the intelligence point of view if Laos and South Vietnam were lost there would be a serious deterioration throughout Southeast Asia and that there would be a great loss of U. S. prestige throughout the world. He said we, therefore, should take the necessary steps to stay in Southeast Asia, which steps might include congressional action, and he would like to see a congressional Resolution in support of that position. Mr. Vinson said he was glad to hear the Director say that, and Mr. Arends, Mr. Bray, and Mr. Osmer agreed. Mr. Vinson said he felt that every member of his committee would vote to stay in Southeast Asia and he intends to have a vote in the current military hearings. He asked if it would help to have a small group from the committee go to Saigon to report to the full committee

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in support of such a Resolution. The Director said he felt such a visit and report would be very informative, that he and Mr. McNamara were on the whole in agreement that the only way they got the feel of the situation was to go out and talk to the people who were actually in the field. Mr. Vinson said he would ask not more than six or seven members to make such a trip and then decide on a Resolution.

3. Mr. Vinson asked Mr. Arends his opinion, and Mr. Arends asked if it would not be good psychology for the South Vietnamese to know that the U. S. was there to stay. The Director noted that the President and the Secretary of Defense make strong statements but then speeches are made in the Congress and editorials published in the newspapers which confuse the South Vietnamese as to our intentions. Mr. Arends said if we know we are going to stay there we should do everything necessary to support that position.

4. Mr. Osmers referred to a CIA estimate that the Viet Cong were at present somewhat stronger and the South Vietnamese somewhat weaker and he did not want to act in the typical unreal American manner but he agreed with Mr. Vinson's plan to send a group to Saigon and that a strong Resolution was needed. He said in his opinion we should either say that we are ready to go to war to stay in Southeast Asia or get out of it now.

5. Mr. Huddleston said he thought it was appropriate to obtain a congressional Resolution to stay in Southeast Asia. Mr. Bray said he thought this was 100 per cent right. In his opinion every time we show that we are together in a situation like this it is effective and we ought to put such speakers as Senator Morse and Senator Fulbright to a vote on the issue. He referred to the effectiveness of the Joint Resolution in the Lebanese situation. Mr. Vinson said he would aim for a Resolution within the next twenty days, but after the committee group returned from Saigon. Mr. Rivers said he had long insisted that the committee should send such a group. He pointed out that while we had gone into Southeast Asia under President Eisenhower that this was a nonpartisan matter and we must stay in. He pointed out that if a group from this committee talked to General Westmoreland about what he needs they would get straight answers from General Westmoreland and, therefore, would be better informed as to what action would be necessary. He said we should make those like Senator Morse fish or cut bait and emphasize that so far as the Armed Services Committee was concerned it had a good record of nonpartisanship on issues of this sort and must continue to be nonpartisan.

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6. Mr. Hebert said he was in full accord with everything that had been said. Mr. Price said he also was in accord but warned against doing anything which would give away any of the military plans.

7. Mr. Vinson asked about the United Nations, and the Director said that of course the diplomatic effort would go through the United Nations, although it might be meaningless and would probably lead to Geneva. On the military aspects, we need all the help we can get from all our allies but a United Nations' action would be useless. Mr. Vinson said this was good to hear.

8. Mr. Vinson asked the Director when he was going to talk to Khanh again to stiffen his back, and the Director said about 1 August and he was working closely with the Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State, and the Ambassador. Mr. Cooper, of CIA, commented that the South Vietnamese needed constant strong assurance of our intention to stay as they became confused and doubtful as a result of the speeches and editorials criticizing our policy. Mr. Rivers asked if the communists pick up such items as the Morse speeches, and the Director commented that all such speeches and editorials of this sort were immediately picked up by the communists and the French and played back into Saigon.

9. Mr. Hebert commented that Mr. Blandford had suggested the Resolution be worded that we would stay as long as the South Vietnamese want us to stay. Mr. Vinson said we would have to be careful about that as it was not entirely consistent, as he felt it was our position that this was our defense line against the communists takeover in all of Southeast Asia.

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LAWRENCE R. HOUSTON
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Attachments